

# Henry Knapp recalled old Camas

Henry A. Knapp can't tell you what Camas was like when he came here — he wasn't doing much observing or talking in those days — for he was born here! But he can tell you a lot about what Camas was like when he was a boy going hunting in the woods where Camas is now located. There wasn't a house, a farm or anything right in Camas in those early days. Mr. Knapp's parents farm was at Grass Valley, 3 miles from Camas, a big place of 475 acres, and it was there he was born in 1868. The Grass Valley school is on land that formerly belonged to the Knapp farm and so is the Camas dairy.

When Henry Knapp was just a lad and Camas was all woods and Washougal consisted of just one store he went to Vancouver with his father on shopping expeditions. At first they drove the big, slow ox team and spent two days on the trip there and back. Later they drove horses and could make the trip in one day. Mr. Knapp remembers the little town as having only three stores, the blacksmith shop, the harness shop and the Hudson's Bay Co. store.

Mr. Knapp added, "We used to have dances that were big events, about 3 or 4 a year, and a dance began in the evening, a big supper was served at midnight and then the dance continued until

about 5 in the morning when likely as not a breakfast was served. Our house was popular for dances, we had a big dancing room upstairs. Mother used to cook for a

week before a dance for the supper was no light refreshments but baked baked ham, chicken, pickles and other things and several kinds of pies and cakes.

## INDIANS SEEN

Indians used to go by the homestead once or twice a year in those days. They were traveling from above Washougal to the Lewis River and would be strung out in a long line so that it might take a day or so for them all to go by. One time a big band of Indians, about 300 altogether, camped on the Washougal River. Suddenly small pox broke out and not knowing what to do for it they tried their usual cure, built sweat houses of brush and moss, heated rocks till they were red hot, put them in little huts and threw water over them to make steam. The Indians would stay in the sweat houses until they could stand it no longer and then run out and jump in the water. Many of them never were able to get out of the water, practically the whole tribe was wiped out with the epidemic — and the treatment.

## THREE MONTHS SCHOOL

"We went to school about three months every winter," Mr. Knapp said, "provided we weren't needed too badly on the farm. It was a small log house, smaller than any room at Central School, and the cracks between the logs were filled with mud. There was a shelf

around the room with benches under for the children to use for desks. Their books were old ones — whatever the family had. We had slates and pencils and the blackboard was a board painted black."



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Mr. Knapp chuckled. "You know, I went to school to the girl I married later," he explained. "The boys and girls in school were of all ages from five or six to 21 and I was one of the oldest when Miss Deborah Woolf came to teach our school. Others that were in the class included the present Mrs. Emil Schnorr, Mrs. Charles Smith, Mrs. Joe Ernest, Ed Doherty, Marion Boyd, Charles Bybee and the late Frank Payne."

"We worked mighty hard in those days," Knapp declares, "from sunup to sunset in the summer time and long hours even in the winter. We raised hay, principally, timothy hay that grew so high you could barely see a man's head as he walked through the field. And we had lots of cows. My mother skimmed by hand all the cream pans and she sold 100 pounds of butter a week."

## Had Good Times

"But we had some mighty good times, too."

"We ate lots of venison in those days. Deer used to come down from the mountains in the winter to this part of the country, a natural grazing ground. We shot them in the fall when they were good and fat and our smokehouse usually had lots of venison quarters hanging there," declared Mr. Knapp.

## Father Legislator

Mr. Knapp's father was in the legislature four terms, he was a member of the legislature when Washington territory became a state. Mr. Knapp believes that people were more satisfied in those early days even though they had to work so hard, than they are now. And remembering when a friend walked all the way to Vancouver to get a doctor when he was very ill, Mr. Knapp believes that folks were grander folks then, too.

"If someone was sick the neighbors went over and did all the work, stayed with the sick person, did everything possible to help. That was the spirit in those times, nothing was too much to do for a friend."

## Had First Prunes

Mr. Knapp's father had the first prune trees in this

territory that he can remember seeing and the prunes sold for 15 to 20 cents a pound. A Mr. Boyer was the first man to put in a big prune orchard, as Mr. Knapp remembers, but Mr. Boyer got rich from his orchard on Prune Hill and other people coming to this territory were all putting in prunes and most of them did very well for prune prices stayed quite a while.

## Mrs. Knapp also pioneer

Miss Woolf, who became Mrs. Knapp in 1889, is of pioneer stock, also, having come west with her parents in 1881 from Iowa. They homesteaded in Fruit Valley, east of Vancouver, but Deborah Woolf at 16 began a teaching career!

Mr. and Mrs. Knapp came to Camas in 1902 after Mr. Knapp had had a severe sick spell and wasn't able to work on the farm. From 1913 to 1922 Mr. Knapp was postmaster here under the Wilson administration. Yes, Mr. Knapp is a democrat, but not the kind of democrat his father was for he declares "my father was such a staunch democrat that he really thought a republican just wasn't to be trusted."

CECIL I. KNAPP, left, holds the gold pen used by his grandfather, Henry Knapp, a territorial legislator, in signing the Washington State constitution in 1889. According to Cecil, his grandfather also "owned a good part" of what is now Camas, but traded it for a section in Grass Valley. Cecil, now 82 and retired after 48 years with Crown Zellerbach, remembers little of his grandfather except that "he had a great, long black beard." Cecil's mother, Deborah Woolf (maiden name) was the teacher at the one-room Grass Valley School, beginning in the late 1880s.

While Cecil began work in the Camas mill part-time, he recalls that he drove the "first truck ever in Camas," doing "all the hauling around town."